



The Russian Revolution of 1905

## Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution

The Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) held its founding Congress in **1898** in Minsk, Russia (all nine delegates were arrested). At that time, and in the early 1900s, no clear distinction was made between “communists” and “social democrats”. Yet the underlying division was already there, as we will see from the Lenin’s **1905** book, “[Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution](#)” (download of extensive compilation linked below).

In **1899** the prominent German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein wrote “Evolutionary Socialism”. Both Rosa Luxemburg (in “Reform or Revolution?”, **1900**) and Lenin (in “What is to be Done?”, **1902**) came to the defense of the revolutionary path. They opposed Bernstein’s reformism and what Lenin dubbed his “economism”.

In **1900** Lenin founded the magazine *Iskra* (“Spark”).

In **1903** the 2<sup>nd</sup> RSDLP Congress took place in Brussels and

London. It resulted in the split between the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, and the Mensheviks, led by Julius Martov. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, control of *Iskra* passed to the Mensheviks (from Issue No. 52) and Lenin thereafter refers to it as “the new *Iskra*”.

Following “Bloody Sunday” (January 22<sup>nd</sup> **1905**) a revolution against the autocracy of the Tsar broke out in Russia. One consequence was the institution of a commission to create the “Duma”, the limited Russian parliament, which eventually came into existence in **1906**.



Russia 1905

The new situation was considered by the Bolsheviks at the 3<sup>rd</sup> **RSDLP Congress in May, 1905**. The Mensheviks were meeting at the same time in a “**Conference**” in Geneva.

Lenin wrote “Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution” in **June and July of 1905**, immediately after the Congress and the Conference. This book is to the Third Congress as “[One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#)” is to the Second Congress. But it is also different, because the circumstances are different. In the “Two Tactics” Lenin refers to and continuously compares the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks, the Congress with the Conference, and the old *Iskra* with the new *Iskra*.

The two tactics (those of the Bolsheviks and those of the

Mensheviks) were both supposed to be attempts at responding to the new circumstances. These are the circumstances of bourgeois democracy, just then being set up for the first time in Russia, and the question was: What should the proletarian revolutionaries do? To understand Lenin's true answer, you must pay close attention.

The circumstances are arguably similar in some respects to South Africa at the present time. Joe Slovo refers to the comparison in his 1988 pamphlet on "[The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution](#)". We may say, with Slovo, that ours is not a bourgeois democratic revolution, it is a National Democratic Revolution. But the question is still: What should the partisans of proletarian revolution be doing in such a period? Studying this revolutionary manual of Lenin's can help us to find answers to this question.

In **1914** most of the national constituents of the Second International opted to support their national governments in the terrible inter-Imperialist slaughter known as the **First World War**. The Bolsheviks and some others, notably some comrades in South Africa, refused, and opposed the war totally. Only after that time did the permanent distinction grow up between the class-collaborator "Social-Democrat" parties on the one hand, and the Communist Parties on the other.

Lenin was consistent. The 1905 book "Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" is already a sustained blast against the vacillating sellout liberals, and in favour of decisive revolution led by the proletariat. He finishes up with the resounding rhetorical question: "Dare We Win?" In the

particular circumstances of 1905, this also meant “Dare we remove the Tsar and make a republic?”

What is a “class collaborator”? Is class collaboration the same as “class alliance”? Absolutely not! Class collaboration is a servile abdication whereby the representatives of the working class subordinate themselves to the interests of the ruling (capitalist) class. The working class is very familiar with such collaborators.

Class alliance, on the other hand, is the necessary politics of revolution. The working class must be independent and it must be autonomous, but it must also have allies from outside of its ranks. In South Africa such allies can be peasants and small business people, professionals and intellectuals, but not the principal oppressor, which is monopoly capital. Class alliance serves to prevent the isolation of the working class, and serves to split the forces available to the dominant part of the bourgeoisie. Class alliance, as unity-in-action, can also secure vital material gains and tactical victories for the working class.

From 1905 only twelve years had to pass in Russia before the two-revolution year of 1917. Many documents exist from that period that could be included in a larger “classics” collection. We will select only two, and then use our penultimate part for the revolutionary year, and the final part for the post-revolutionary situation.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, Selection, 1905, Lenin.](#)
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